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*Jim
and his Soul*



W. J. Dawson

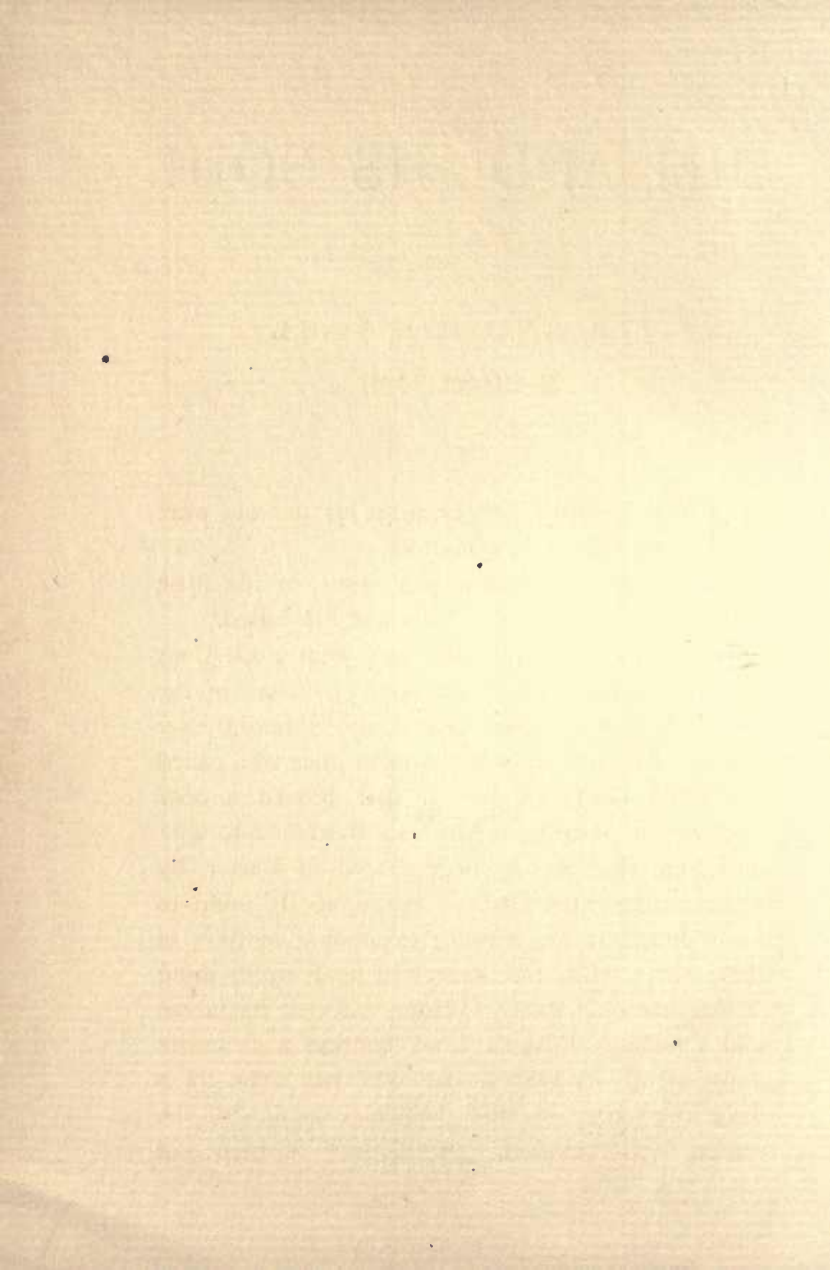
JIM AND HIS SOUL

BY

W. J. DAWSON



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JIM AND HIS SOUL

A Street Idyll

I

HE was called Jim because his parents were deficient in imagination.

"It's as good a name as any other for the little beggar," said his father. "It's wot I'm called."

He then banged the door and went out. Jim's mother lay quiet under the sloping ceiling of the attic which she called home, and thought over things. She had known a woman once who called her child Gustavus, but it had proved a poor speculation. Gustavus had been shortened to Gus, and from that it had degenerated to Buster, by which name "the Street" made up its mind to know him. It was no use explaining matters to the Street; when the Street had made up its mind it was irreconcilable. "Buster" tickled its fancy, and punching Buster's head became a favourite amusement. When Buster was run over by a dray the gaiety of that particular section of the nation was eclipsed. A distinct element of

humour had passed out of its life, and the Street sorrowed.

She had known a woman once who had eleven children, and had found a Bible name for each of them. That was a long while ago, however, when she had lived in the country, where Bibles are sometimes found. There were no Bibles in Paradise Street. She closed her eyes and thought quietly, and a surprising vision slid under the closed eyelids. She saw cornfields, bordered by hedges in which blackberries grew thick, and a little river with brown pebbles, and tall elm-trees, and cresting the hill, like plumes, a plantation of tasselled larches. She heard a lark singing, and the little river seemed to sing also as it flowed. The sky was so big that it frightened her, and it was so blue you seemed to look right into it, and through it, and yet never came to the end. Then she remembered the woman with the biblical children again, and recollected that when the eleventh was born it took a week to find a name, and folks said they had given the boy a girl's name after all. It was clear that the Bible was not much good for naming children.

She felt very tired and weak, as well she might. There had been very little work to be had lately, and little work meant little food. She felt that she ought to be up and about ; it was a dreadful waste of time to be there doing nothing. But

when she tried to sit up her head fell back heavily, and her hands trembled. Then she lay quite still again, enjoying rather guiltily the sense of absolute inactivity. The only time she had ever had any rest in her life was when her children had been born. She had had five, and they were all dead. "Insufficient nourishment," the doctor said, which was no doubt a very true remark, but not a helpful one. That made her think of little Jim. She unconsciously drew the small bundle of humanity closer to her bosom, and the warmth of the child's body soothed her, and sent a little pulse of motherhood thrilling with a live joy through her nerves. Then she thought again of the five who had died of insufficient nourishment, and she remembered that little Jim was a Mouth. If children were self-supporting creatures, if, for example, you could turn them out to browse at once like new-born lambs, Paradise Street would not have objected to their presence. That not being the case, and there being nothing particular to browse upon in Paradise Street, the accepted doctrine was that children were calamities. In the meantime the newly arrived calamity slept, with little red fists doubled up pugnaciously, and as his mother gathered her thin arms around him she forgot he was a Mouth.

Toward evening something happened. Jim the elder had been out several hours, but that was not

unusual. When the darkness set in, and he had not returned, however, his wife began to grow uneasy, for he had promised to be back in an hour or two. She had had nothing to eat since the early morning. She heard doors banging below, and wheels in the street, and the shouts of the costers, and she knew what hour it was by the lighting of the street lamps. Suddenly she was conscious of heavy feet upon the stairs, and loud whisperings at the door. Then the door opened, and she made out the figure of a man standing sheepishly on the threshold. Two or three women stood behind him engaged in the task of pushing him forward.

"Go on in, and get it done, Bill," murmured a hoarse voice.

"You've got to say it, and wot is, is," was the next remark, which was undoubtedly philosophic.

"We've chose you, and you must," the voices murmured in chorus.

Thus adjured, the man entered the room, and stood within a yard of the bed. He had a greasy cap in his hand, which appeared also to be soaked with water. He held it out meditatively.

"I thought as 'ow you might like to 'ave this 'ere," he said huskily. "Just a relict, you know—a relict of your old man!"

He had accomplished his task, and smiled to

himself at his success. He believed he had been sympathetic.

"Wot!" cried Jim's wife, as she sat up in the bed. "Wot do you say?"

"A relict—just a relict, you know; thought as 'ow you might like to 'ave it," repeated the man.

"Oh, get away, you fool, and leave her to me!" cried a woman's voice. "Your Jim's been drowned, and that's his 'at. That's wot it is, God love ye!"

"Fell inter the dock!" cried the women in chorus.

"They're a-grapplin' for 'im," they added by way of imparting vividness to the picture.

"And this 'ere's 'is 'at," said the man again, determined not to be left out. "Thought you might like to 'ave it as a relict."

It was thus little Jim's mother knew that Jim was all she had left to her in the world.

II

WHEN Jim began to grow up he found himself very much alone. His mother went out to work in the early morning, and usually did not come home till late at night. When he was very little, she used to put the fire out before she went, and she left him to amuse himself as he could in the lonely attic. His amusements were strictly limited.

Sometimes he got a piece of lovely black coal and played with it, asking it many questions, till he grew angry because it would not keep up the conversation, and then he threw it away. Sometimes he climbed up to the window and watched for hours the smoke curling from an endless wilderness of chimney-pots, and the dirty sparrows twittering and jiggling along the gutters of the roof. He tried hard to get them to play with him, but whenever he tapped the window-pane they winked their little beady eyes at him, and hopped further away, with an indignant shake of sooty feathers. Sometimes, in the late winter afternoons, he saw certain small points of light like pinholes in the smoke-haze overhead, but he did not know they were stars. Once the full moon stopped and looked into the window, and then he cried with fright. It was like a great pale face, and, like everything he knew, it was dumb. He liked the gas-lamps better, for he knew that when they were lit his mother would soon come. Thus he lived the day out after his own fashion, and when he was tired he crept into the bed and went to sleep. His only wish was that he might sleep all the time.

When he was six years old he took up his abode permanently in the streets. They were his nursery, his restaurant, his church, his school, his university. He graduated with honours. He was perfectly happy, because he had no sense of sin or desire

for better things to trouble him. He was content with the gutter. He would have enjoyed the husks which the swine do eat, and have quarrelled with the pigs for a larger share. There is very little doubt that the pigs would have come off second best in such a struggle.

Likewise he had never heard of God, though he often heard of the devil. Of course he knew the word God well enough, but his notions of its meaning were hazy. The policeman served for a convenient incarnation of both the good and evil principles of the world. When he marched down the street majestic in bright uniform, and was good-humoured, Jim thought that he was God; when he was surly on wet days, and drove the boys out of the gutter, Jim thought he was the devil, and, indeed, told him so. It made no difference to the policeman what Jim thought, anyway. Their spheres were too far apart.

Up to this time it is doubtful if Jim had a soul; at all events, he was not conscious of it. Then it happened that he picked up one day a flower, and the flower told him he had a soul. He was unwholesomely familiar with potato peelings, and onion stalks, and cabbage leaves, picturesquely arabesqued with mud spots and yellow splotches of decay, but he had never seen a flower. The flower he picked up was a white hyacinth.

The first thing that amazed him was its perfume.

The rich arrowy odour stole along his senses, and pierced his brain, and caused a sort of stinging delight within him. For the first time it occurred to him that the gutter had a smell also, a smell by no means hyacinthine. Then he noticed the purity of the flower, and simultaneously he discovered that he was dirty. The flower looked at him reproachfully, and seemed to draw back from him. He would have liked to kiss it, but he was afraid. He did put it to his lips, but its coldness repulsed him. He laid it down upon the steps of the church where he happened to be sitting, and looked at it a long while. Just then the bells began to ring high up in the tower, and they too seemed to have a voice that was reproachful. The flower said, "There's a world you have never seen, and that is where I belong—a world that is always fresh and odorous and beautiful." The bells said, "There's a world up here too, right above the smoke, where we live, and we are the voices which inhabit it; hear how happy are we!" Then a great longing began to grow in the heart of little Jim. He did not know what he wanted, but he felt that it was something wonderful and beautiful, and which he could never get. He took up the hyacinth again, and the odour of it thrilled through him, until something seemed to hurt him in his side—something that throbbed and made him sad, and filled his eyes with tears, he knew not how nor

why. He did not know, but that was the moment when the Soul was born in him. It entered into him with the fragrance of the hyacinth, and the music of the bells, and the pain he felt was its birth-throe. Jim got up solemnly, and took the flower in his hand, and went home slowly, feeling that something had happened to him. He marched down the middle of the muddy street holding the flower at arm's length before him, for fear it should touch his dirty rags, and be angry with him. He passed a whole bruised orange in the gutter, but he did not even stop to look at it. The flower would not let him.

That night when Jim's mother came home she found him fast asleep, with the flower carefully laid out beside him on half of the front page of the *Police News*. She filled a cracked jam-pot with water and put the flower into it. Then the flower must have told her something also—something about the elm-trees, and the brook, and the old-fashioned farm-garden where the nasturtiums climbed when she was young; for she sat very silently before the fireless grate, and did nothing for fully ten minutes. The flower had made her think, and thinking had the curious effect of making her apron travel to her eyes.

III

WHEN Jim's soul came into him several things

happened. For one thing, all the glory of the street had faded. The gutter was no longer a place of delight. The making of mud-pies was no more an amusement for the gods. Paradise Street (why are all the worst streets called by the loveliest names ?) had suddenly become squalid.

A spirit of adventure possessed Jim, and the soul was the cause of it. He had never travelled half a hundred yards from "the Street" in his life. He had a dim notion that there was a world not far away, and he resolved to see it. Not Vasco di Gama nor Columbus felt more elated when they drove their prows into the unknown waters, and marked the flight of strange land-birds over the foaming waste, than was Jim when he emerged out of "the Street" into the Strand. The lights dazzled him, and the throng of wheels frightened him. When he got into Trafalgar Square he was possessed of a great horror. He had never seen an open space before, and it seemed terrible. But when he reached St. James's Park an ecstasy seized him ; for here were trees, here were green-sward and water, and here were flowers. The trees shook their boughs as though they were living things that might pursue him, and the water lay dark in the evening light, and the flowers looked at him through the dusk, and sent him a message in the only language they know—the language of fragrance. Jim stood silent, a pathetic

little figure, with hands clasped behind his back, and ragged breast thrust well forward, and greasy cap laid beside him on the path. It must have been the soul that told him to take his cap off in the presence of the flowers. He had never done so before ; it was the first symptom of a prayer. Then he ran home as fast as he could, for the trees frightened him.

When the soul comes into even the dingiest little body it makes itself felt by the desire to know and to love. The School Board captured Jim and taught him to know ; it was the same blessed agency that gave him the chance of loving. Jim was twelve years old when he began to love, and this was how it happened.

There was a little girl who was captured by the School Board about the same time as Jim, and from the same neighbourhood. She was not pretty, for prettiness is not frequent in the slums. She was poorly clothed, of course, but she was always neat. She sometimes had a ribbon round her neck, which may have been the working of the barbaric or the spiritual instinct, I can't say which. She had fair hair and dark grey eyes, and she was a cripple. Jim saw her limping home one cruel day when the streets were slippery with frozen mud, and the soul inside him told him to help her, and he did it. From that he learned to accompany her home every day. They shared their crusts

together. When it was cold they took each other's hands for warmth. They often sat down on a doorstep and talked, their hands clasped all the while.

"Jim," she said one day, "do you think it's any good being born? I don't."

"Don't know," said Jim, who had not travelled quite so far in the realm of philosophic doubt.

"I don't," she answered, with conviction, "'specially when you're a cripple. My father beat me last night," she said. "He often beats mother. I don't think I shall go home to-night."

That alarmed Jim, and also excited his curiosity

"What are yer goin' to do, then?" he asked.

"Drown myself," said the child solemnly. "Lots of people does it, an' it doesn't hurt much."

"That yer ain't," said Jim.

"Why not?"

"'Cause I ain't a-goin' to let yer," he replied, with masculine authority.

"I am," said the child. "An' I know a place, too. It's awful deep. I'll show it yer, if yer like."

Jim ought then to have imposed his masculine authority again, but he did not. His curiosity overcame him. He thought there would be no harm in looking at the place.

"Very well," said he, "let's look at it. But mind, I ain't a-goin' to let yer."

Across the Strand, no more a place of terror,

they passed, and round the corner of Charing Cross, and down the historic way to Westminster. They mutually agreed it would be best to go by the best streets to "the place," anyway. There's no use in going by the most unpleasant way to the scaffold. A hundred years ago criminals rather enjoyed riding to Tyburn on their coffins. They probably felt the exhilaration of being part of a procession. They are much less cheerful nowadays, when the scaffold yawns at the end of a whitewashed passage.

But when they reached Westminster, and were crossing the broad road to the Embankment, suddenly the fog thickened, and rolled down like a sooty curtain. A hansom rushed past, with its great flashing lamps like awful eyes turned upon them. In the scuffle to get out of the way they were separated, and the darkness rolled between them.

"Where are yer?" shouted Jim. "Annie, Annie, Annie!" At each cry his voice grew shriller, till it was a shriek.

"She's gone an' done it!" he cried.

He felt his way along the cold, slimy wall of the Embankment. He heard the dismal lap of the tide far down on the other side. The lamp burned spectral; the roar of the city, like the stifled anger of some great beast behind its bars, reverberated dully through the blackness. An evil

odour rose out of the river, a deathly smell from the rancid mud which perhaps covered those who had "done it." Jim's courage failed him. He ran along by the wall till he came to a great opening, which yawned like a monstrous mouth before him. It seemed as though a bit of the world had fallen out, and unfathomable space lay below. His voice grew hoarse with shouting, and the cold pricked his bones.

"It's no good!" he sobbed at last. "She's done it! I've lost 'er."

Then through the fog he heard a footstep with a limp in it. He rushed forward, and there was Annie. He was going to be angry, which is the natural masculine method of expressing love under such circumstances. But the soul would not let him. Instead of being angry, he did an altogether extraordinary thing. He put his arms round the little shivering cripple and kissed her. He had never kissed any one but his mother in his life, and that not often. And then there ran through every nerve, tingling right down to his bare toes. a delicious shock, a warmth and yearning, a saturating, sufficing joy, which made it seem as though the whole world had become sunlit, and as if all the flowers of the world had suddenly flung themselves in his face, drenching him with dew and fragrance.

I don't suppose anybody will believe this, but

that doesn't matter. When a starved heart wakes up prince and beggar feel much the same, but the beggar has the best of it. If Dante could have kissed Beatrice thus at the corner of that lovely old Ponte Vecchio in Florence, he would have felt much the same as when poor Jim kissed the cripple girl, and found out thereby how love tasted.

IV

IT was May morning on the Embankment. The long rows of plane-trees had a green film upon them, and Spring ran light-footed from tree-top to tree-top with a thrilling whisper about good times coming, which she communicated to each in turn. When the trees heard it they trembled for joy, and the branches began to talk to each other, and to say, "See how green we are getting!" A warm wind from the south blew over the river, and a smooth white cloud lay along the southern sky, on which the sun sparkled as though it were snow. The dirty Thames had a holiday look, and the muddy little waves had small sparkles of occasional emerald on their crests. The dingy sparrows knew that something was the matter; one or two were washing themselves in the little pools left by the night's rain, and the rest were darting about with such swiftness that they seemed to turn somersaults as they went. Down the river a red-sailed barge moved slowly, with a dog bark-

ing joyously at her bows. The cabmen had flowers in their coats, and occasionally a sprig of green twisting in the corner of their mouths. There was cheerfulness and vital joy in the air, for London was shaking off the soot of winter, and was getting ready for a more welcome visitor.

At the Westminster Bridge corner of the Embankment our two children stood, but children no more. Jim was gay in uniform; he was now a telegraph messenger, and it was his proud task to shout as he passed into his work every morning, "87 on Duty!" It gave him an immense sense of dignity to utter that formula. It was always repeated with chest thrown forward, and head thrown back, in right soldierly fashion. In such moments he did not feel that he belonged to Her Majesty's Postal Service; he felt that it belonged to him.

Every morning he met Annie at the corner of the Bridge. She had now become a flower-seller, and something of the sweetness of the flowers had passed into her face. She was pale, and as she had grown older had become fragile; her grey eyes had purple shadows under them, and her mouth had a tenseness about its corners which suggested suffering. Her lameness had become more manifest. She used a crutch now, and had a sensitive dread of having it noticed. Often and

often as she sat beside the Bridge, watching the long stream of people passing and re-passing, she imagined that every one looked at her crutch, and not at her flowers. Thousands of eyes regarded her, and every one seemed to burn like flame. They instinctively sought the crutch, and she saw the thought vibrate across each brain, "She's a cripple, poor thing." But there was a quiet glow always on her face in these early mornings. It was her time of perfect happiness, for then Jim was with her. Often, too, the mornings were exquisite, and they alone might make a glory on any face that watched them. For then the air was often very still, and a fragrance of rain-washed meadows penetrated it, and the clouds took strange shapes and colours, and the gilded towers of Westminster were touched with a fire of dawn which added magic grace to their soaring symmetry. No doubt Annie felt something of all this in a dumb way, for the mornings inspired her with a sense of unuttered friendliness and fascination; but if you had asked her, she would have said that Jim's face was the real morning to her.

There was no one stirring, and they sat together and talked in the old way, hand in hand.

"I'm very tired sometimes," said the girl, "but then I think of yer, Jim, an' know the next mornin' ain't far off, an' I 'old up."

"I'm goin' to marry yer soon as I'm able," said

Jim, "an' then yer sha'n't sell nothin' no more in the streets, leastways in winter."

"Oh, but I like selling the flowers," said the girl. "I've got to love 'em in a way. They make me wonder all about wot it's like where they grows. You' went there once, didn't you, Jim? Tell's about it again."

"Yer knows it all," said Jim; but he brightened all the same with eagerness to go back to such a theme. It was the great event of his life.

"'Twas at a place they call Dorkin' I saw it. I was 'most frightened at first, like as 'ow when I was a kid and first see'd the Park. There was no end of fields, and yer could see where the sky and the earth jined. They stretched right on and on, and every hedge you see'd had white flowers on 'un, and some of the trees had flowers too. When a cloud come over them yer didn't see nothin' but somethin' whity and pinky, but 'when the cloud rolled by then those flowers fairly danced, they was so glad, and kinder sparkled one to 'nother. There was a wood there too, an' I looked inter it. Why, the floor of it was all blue an' yellor, like as though a carpet were drawed over it. 'Twas flowers everywhere; 'twas burstin' with 'em. I looked just to see if no one saw me, an' then I went in, an' I rolled in 'em. There was so many it didn't make no difference, my rollin'. I rolled over and over, an' laughed till I cried, an' I 'urt

my ead, but I didn't know it, I was that 'appy. I think that wood knowed I was 'appy, for there was birds singin' everywhere all the time I rolled. 'Twas the 'eavenliest roll I ever 'ad. I could smell them flowers in my clothes for a week arter. I'm goin' to save up, an' next Bank 'Oliday you an' me 'll go there an' roll."

The girl had often heard the story, but she never tired of it. She liked to think it over in the dull moments of the day when she was selling nothing. Then she used to take the delicate jonquils and violets from her basket, and try to imagine what sort of place it was they were born in. When nobody was looking she used to place them against her lips and whisper her wishes to them, and their purity comforted and refreshed her.

"Good-bye," said Jim; "time's up—I'm off."

"Good-bye," said the girl.

She took a yellow jonquil from her basket and gave it him. It was like a visible kiss passed between them. For a moment all London had sunk away from them, and they were simply two human souls conscious of each other. It lasted only an instant, and the jonquil was its memorial.

V

THE Bank Holiday had come, and with it the long-deferred joy for which Jim and Annie had

hoped through many a blazing July day. The frugal pennies had accumulated, and they had been invested in two cheap tickets to the sea. They had never seen the sea, and had no notion what it meant. They sat together now on a little knoll of the downs and gazed at it in speechless wonder.

"I didn't never know there wor anythink in the world as big as that," said Jim. "An' I never knowed there was so much sky anywhere, neither!"

"That's 'cos you don't see it all together anywhere in Lunnon," said the girl philosophically. "It's split up into little bits."

"It makes me frightened almost," continued the girl. "It's so lovely. There's such a lot of it!"

"I ain't frightened," said the boy, with a fine sense of valour. "I should like to go on it, I should!"

"Then yer won't," she said vehemently. "I ain't a-going to let yer!"

The boy for answer put his arm round her waist. He had no fine language to express his love, but he had a keen joy of proprietorship in the girl all the same. She knew it, and shyly slipped her hand into his. Then they sat quite silent, and gazed upon the sparkling wonder of the sea again.

Far away into boundlessness spread the vast level fields of azure, streaked here and there with

patches of green and purple, like a finely variegated marble. The sun beat upon it, till it seemed to give back from its depths an answering light. Far to the southward lay a long range of clouds, dark at the base, but piled up in white masses at the summit, and over the snowy bosses of these immaterial Alps grey stains of vapour slowly floated, and seemed to hang in their cloven hollows.

The whole vast range moved nearer also by slow degrees, and presently a gust of wind ran across the downs, and shook the leaves of the neighbouring hedges with a sigh. From the moment that this first faint breath of wind began, a rapid change passed over sea and sky. The sea turned from azure to a livid grey, and the sky bowed down to meet it. Long thin scarves of cloud travelled swiftly across the heavens, and the sun disappeared behind them. Then a deep hollow sound rolled up out of the sea, and fell upon the ear in volleys, which every moment became clearer and more rapid. There was a storm brewing, and the clouds were labouring up with the stored weight of thunder. The girl picked up the few field-flowers that she had gathered in the lane leading to the downs, just as the first warm drops of rain began to fall. The town lay a mile away, and the railway station half a mile beyond the town. Long before they reached it the storm was on them, and the rain came rushing down like a

cataract. In the station the people stood in a dense crowd. Those who had got there first had filled the waiting-rooms, and the late comers could barely edge their way along the unsheltered platform. Jim and Annie were among the latest, and stood holding each other's hands on the very edge of the platform. This strange anger of the heavens frightened them, and the thunder shook their hearts.

No one could tell how it happened, for it was done in a moment. There was an ugly sway of the crowd as the train came in, and Annie slipped, and fell across the rails. In an instant Jim had leaped to her rescue. He lifted her up, and a score of hands were stretched out to pull her back to the platform. But he was too late to save himself. Before he could spring out of the way the engine had struck him, and the great grinding wheels passed over him.

They bore him away to the hospital, and Annie went with him.

"He were a plucky one, were that!" said the porter, as he laid a sheet over the boy, and drew his hand across his eyes.

"They come down together, they did," said a rough fellow, eager to share in the notoriety of the disaster. "'Twere 'is girl, I guess. I sat beside 'em in the carriage, I did."

The girl did not hear. She limped along the

street, with eyes that saw nothing but that dismal stretcher and that which lay upon it. And when they reached the hospital she passed in unquestioned with the tragic burden.

VI

IT was very quiet in the little hospital, except in the accident ward, where sounds of stertorous breathing were heard, and now and again a low stifled cry of pain from some sufferer whose endurance had given way. The windows were open, and the sweet air of the sea travelled through them, and wandered softly up and down these unfamiliar realms of suffering. Close beside the hospital was a church, and on the still evening air the music of its organ sounded, now loud, now faintly, in the evensong. The nurses often thanked God for that neighbouring music; it brought soothing and inspiration to their hearts, tired with the burden of incessant service, strained with the excess of hourly sympathy for forms of pain which knew alleviation, but no remedy. It was like a solemn assurance that all the harsh discords of earth would be resolved at length into some final harmony; that when the long travail of earth, of which they knew so much, reached its close, some masterhand pressed upon the organ-keys of the world would strike the chord

of peace, perhaps of triumph. The church doors were open, and through them floated the familiar music of the evening hymn, sung by clear boys' voices, that dominated the scattered voices of the congregation, and gathered them into a harmonious whole—

"Glory to Thee, my God, this night,
For all the blessings of the light ;
Keep me, O keep me, King of Kings,
Beneath Thine own Almighty wings."

For some in that ward the blessings of the light would return no more, and the wings that stooped above them were the wings of death.

And of that number was Jim. Annie sat beside the narrow white bed, and held his hand. She had not relinquished the little bunch of field-flowers she had fastened in her dress just before the accident, and the poor withered daisies lay upon the bed. The girl was lost to all consciousness of her surroundings ; her face was pale, and seemed narrowed, her form looked more fragile than ever. She did not notice that at a sign from the nurse a screen was being placed about the bed. The nurse stooped and touched her on the shoulder. She said softly—

"Don't you think you had better go now?"

But the girl did not move. The only sign she gave of having heard the words was a quick, nervous movement of the arm that lay across the

bed, and a tighter grasp upon the hand of the dying boy.

The rays of the setting sun struck long shafts across the top of the screen; the music of the hymn swelled louder—

“Teach me to live that I may dread
The grave as little as my bed;
Teach me to die that so I may
Rise glorious at the awful day.”

Then it died away into the tenderness of that touching prayer—

“Oh may my soul on Thee repose,
And may sweet sleep my eyelids close.”

Something stirred within the girl, some violent reaction of feeling, and her quiet eyes had unaccustomed fire in them.

“He ain’t dyin’, is he?” she cried. “He can’t be dyin’!”

The nurse for answer passed her hand gently over the girl’s head.

“It’s wicked to let ’im die!” she cried. “I ain’t got no one else in the world. An’ we was goin’ to be married!”

The organ swelled out clamorous and strident with the Doxology and Amen, and the nurse was glad for the first time in her life that the music had ceased. She had never felt it inappropriate before.

Perhaps it was the music roused the dying boy, perhaps the shrill voice of the girl and her convulsive grasp upon his hand. He slowly opened his eyes.

"An' it were the 'eavenliest roll I ever 'ad," he muttered. "There was flowers everywhere."

There was a pause. Then he said in a clear voice, "No. 87 on Duty." His thoughts had travelled back to his daily work, and he had uttered the formula of which he had been so proud in the days when he felt that Her Majesty's Telegraph Service owed everything to his punctuality and diligence. And then his eyes closed for ever, and in the same moment the sun left the ward, and the twilight began.

The Soul of Jim had been freed and vindicated.
No. 87 had died on duty.

THE CHILLED HEART

*The roar of the streets at their loudest
Rises and falls like a tune :
Midday in the heart of London,
Midway in the month of June.
God knows how I yearn for the mountains,
And the river that runs between ;
Ah, well ! I can wait—and the pastures
Of Heaven are always green.*

THE CHILLED HEART

WE all knew him in that crowded district of small houses which lies on the eastmost edge of Hoxton—so urbane and gentle in his ways, so dignified in his unacknowledged poverty. John Paterson was a little man, grey and shrunk, who would be quite unnoticeable in a crowd; but placed among half-a-dozen persons of the small shopkeeper class, among whom his dignity would have room to exert itself, he was very noticeable indeed. The sort of man who reveals himself only on occasion, and chooses his occasion with intuitive penetration; the sort of man who never finds more than one or two friends in a long life, and is thought unsocial because he cannot sacrifice on every roadside altar—chiefly, however, by those persons who are content with the tepid familiarities of acquaintanceship, and never know the intimacies of a noble friendship.

How he ever came to be the minister of that dismal little chapel in Dagnall Road was a mystery, which, however, was not without solution, as we shall see. For it was surely the poorest and meanest place of its kind which was ever mis-

begotten of theologic separatism and sectarian ambition. You approached it by a narrow aperture, the walls of which were rubbed into a greasy glaze by the passing of shoulders innumerable—shoulders of men who wore stout Nonconformist broadcloth in the palmy days of Dagnall Road, of matrons who wore stiff brocade or stout velvet woven on the looms of Spitalfields; long since, like the looms of Spitalfields, covered with dust, and given over to forgetfulness. No broadcloth or velvet passed that way now; fustian, on its way to Dagnall's Rents, which yawned in permanent dilapidation behind the chapel; on Sundays, an occasional tweed on the way to the high, bare pews of Dagnall Chapel. There were tablets on the walls of the chapel, sacred to the memory of the broadcloth and velvet generation; these alone preserved the repute of the dismal and decayed conventicle. There was a tradition that carriages had been known to stop at the gloomy portico of Dagnall's Rents; but that was merely the rumour of a prehistoric period. Within living memory no carriage had ever been visible in Dagnall Road, except, of course, the gloomy equipages of the undertaker, round which ragged children gathered, engaged in awestruck, but yet cheerful anticipations of the strange splendours which attended even children when they were dead. The tide of life which rolled down the Dagnall Road was

muddy, like the streets ; the chapel was merely a battered hulk—with memories of past triumphs echoing in it, as the sea may be supposed to vibrate still in the timbers of the vessel whose voyages are done—a hulk left to rot upon a slimy bank, over which the living waters will flow no more.

There were hours, occasional and brief, when Dagnall Road took on an aspect of brightness—pathetic, as on spring mornings when its dinginess indulged in a bath of sunshine ; hilarious, toward eight o'clock and onward, on winter evenings, when the naphtha lamps flared at the costers' stalls ; washed with silver on rare nights when the moon turned the gleaming tram-lines into a magic road, leading to the infinite. But the general aspect was grey, grey and sordid. Turbid, too ; a tumultuous stream, heavy with the loam of humanity, beating its way down the high-walled street, as a swollen river in a narrow channel. Men shouted, hoarsely competitive ; women shrieked, in shrill bargainings ; children ran in and out among the stalls, like small gnomes, sedulous in theft and mischief ; dogs barked, and the naphtha lamps hissed and bubbled. Always, over all, there hung a weightier sound—a boom and roar as of the sea, the noise of huge waves, resonant and clangorous. John Paterson knew that roar well, and loved it. It was to him the great orchestra of Time, setting the

rhythm of his simple life. It was a large music, which gave dignity to that which was naturally sordid; he was unconscious of poverty and a narrow lot when that music filled his heart.

It needed something of the kind, some sense of the general vastness of human destiny, to redeem such a life as John Paterson's from absolute stagnation. He had preached so often and so long, with no result that was visible; had poured out so rich and fertilising a stream of sympathy on the dull loam of Dagnall Street, with no sign of quickening seed or answering harvest. A few scant ears, blasted by the east wind—that was all. Old Thomas Huckle, the hoarse vendor of cheap vegetables; Jones, the quick-eyed cobbler, who lived in two rooms at the entrance to the Rents, and one or two bed-ridden pensioners, who shared the small endowments of the chapel—these loved him. Huckle blessed him out of the back of his ruined throat, and Jones had been even known to stop work for a full ten minutes, for the mere pleasure of looking him in the face. There were children, too, half a score of prematurely ripened fruits of the gutter, sharp-featured and sharp-flavoured with experience of the world; these grew human and almost simple of heart beneath his touch. John Paterson came nearest to happiness when he talked with these people. They were his friends, his true flock. He had saved

Huckle and Jones from drunkenness by saving them from the harsh monotony of life. The children he had saved from worse evils, and all by that jet of fertilising sympathy, or rather—shall we say?—that soft dew of kindness which he dropped silently upon their sterile little hearts. In his best moments John Paterson told himself that this was worth living for, and he was content.

In the moments which were not his best, when the grey cloud hung above his heart, he had his resource in this ideal vastness of London, the sense of immense destinies working themselves out through the turbulence of the great unquiet city. A strange resource? But a real one. For he could lose himself in these roaring multitudes, as in a sea. Dagnall Chapel was then as some forgotten pool, tideless and reed-choked; he was a swimmer in the infinite, and an ocean throbbed beneath him. When the melancholy fit came upon him he knew what to do, and did it. He sought the great thoroughfares, and let the tide of life carry him whither it would; stood now amid the shipping of the Docks, and thought of the strange sights which seamen had beheld from those bare masts huddled in the opaque air; now, perhaps, on the pavement by the Bank, and thought of the piles of gold that lay behind those grimy walls. He wandered westward, keenly conscious of the beauty of passing faces, the glitter of fine equipages,

the rhythmic thud of horses' feet on the wooden pavements, and sometimes on the kneaded gravel of the "Row"; sat in the Park, and felt the dignity of those broad elms and wide, green spaces; galloped in thought with this or that rider, in whom he recognised some peculiar grace or beauty, inventing fine romances all the while, and dreams of stately life, and satisfied and noble love—and for background of it all some fancy of lands which he would never see, the olive-slopes of Bordighera, the ice pinnacles of Switzerland, the orange-groves of Italy.

He imagined dramas as he walked, the history of this or that man whose face arrested him; or, more frequently, of some woman, whose tired eyes seemed seeking everywhere for something never found; fancied what he would say if she spoke to him, whether, after all, he who talked every Sunday of Divine secrets, knew the secret himself—whether there was any secret that any man could know. All the while that deep suspended thunder of the streets filled his heart, and drowned the peevish clamour of personal complaint. Nothing mattered in such hours as these. He was nothing more than a single bead of foam drifted on the wide ocean. The largeness of the world moved his blood, the wonder and the mystery of life entranced him.

Then, when the lamps were lit, new fancies

came, and a certain briskness of pleasure thrilled his senses. All so glistening, so gay ; such wealth carelessly displayed in shop windows ; such a blaze of light, with here and there oases of reticent gloom—dim streets, like dark caverns, opening behind great thoroughfares, where figures passed at intervals, shrouded and unsubstantial, like ghosts of the night, inarticulate at the doors of fairy palaces—how wonderful it all was, how infinitely suggestive ! Sometimes he stood quite still for a while, only watching ; sometimes moved rapidly, alert with this strange life which London puts into dull hearts. Then came the vision of the light upon the clock-tower, the mass of stately buildings by the river, the great figure of Nelson crowned with stars, and thoughts of past and present, rapid mind-pictures of Trafalgar, of solemn men around a scaffold by the Banqueting Hall, of Blake borne up the Thames amid the cry of trumpets to his burial in Westminster—all the majesty and unexpectedness of history, the sense of the meagreness of time, and the greatness of the deeds which fill it. Late at night he would get back to Dagnall Road, tired but elated. This also, squalid Dagnall Road, with flaring naphtha lamps and shouting costers, was part of this city of infinite destinies. Into that vast tapestry of life which is evermore patterned on the restless loom of Time this scrap of grey was also being

inwoven. Tired and elated, but once more content, as the swimmer is who at last touches land, but feels all the salt stir and vibration of the sea still beating in his blood.

He lived alone, and, as might be expected, with extreme frugality. He had two small rooms, a bedroom and a sitting-room, each of them full of books. Any one who had carefully examined his books would have found that many bore the crest of a well-known college on their fly-leaves, for John Paterson was college-bred. The books were significant of the man ; they were mostly in good editions of some twenty years ago—a little out of date now, but still serviceable. One would have remarked also that there were few books of any later date than those of twenty years ago. At a glance the shrewd observer would have known that John Paterson's life was cut in twain by that date : before it, books such as a man of scholarly and fastidious tastes rejoices in, in plenty ; after that, no further purchases. One saw, too, that they were not often read nowadays. Plato was there, Dante and Goethe, but dust lay on the edges. To me, who alone knew him with intimacy, he never spoke of books or reading. An accent of scholarship was in his speech, occasionally an elusive reference to some immortal author—but that was all. He looked round upon his books with obvious indifference, with even a touch of

impatience, as of a man who had discovered their entire futility as warmth for a chilled heart. He lived mostly an outdoor life, jostling in and out among people to whom his scholarship could not have been of the slightest service ; and one would have said that he was anxious to forget both his books and the life that lay behind them. They were manifestly a bequest of brighter days—a bequest more painful by its memories than pleasurable by its gains.

For the extreme frugality of John Paterson's life there were reasons obvious and ample. There was a small endowment attached to the chapel of some sixty pounds a year, of which he was the recipient. The scanty free-will offerings of the congregation added perhaps another forty pounds to this sum—certainly not more. Such was the poverty of the congregation that this total sum was esteemed affluence, and there were those who wondered how John Paterson could spend so much. It was a favourite topic of discussion between Jane Slump the charwoman and Matilda Harris the step-cleaner, each of whom had attended the chapel since a remote youth, what the minister did with so much money, and how very differently they would administer it, if it were theirs. But it was not John Paterson's way to let any one know how he spent his income. There were half-a-dozen poor bed-ridden creatures in Dagnall's

Rents, half-a-dozen old men in the lanes and alleys which ran off from Dagnall Road, who could have told a great deal had they not been deeply pledged to silence. John Paterson gave away at least a fourth part of his income. He did it quietly and secretly, asking no thanks, and rarely getting them, desirous only that the recipients of his bounty should keep the pledge of silence which he imposed upon them. Many men have been much less secretive in the commission of crimes than he was in the commission of charities. He smiled contentedly over the reputation of avarice which had been diligently created for him by the untiring tongues of Mrs. Slump and Matilda Harris ; he preferred being suspected of meanness to being detected in unjustified generosity.

In the beginning of his pastorate at Dagnall Chapel it had been known that John Paterson had a wife, but it was understood that as the income was not sufficient for the support of both, it had been mutually arranged that his wife should live in the country with her friends, until such time as things improved with "the cause." That was ten years ago, when one or two persons of settled income still belonged to the chapel, and some sense of generosity was still alive among the people. They admitted that it was hard to part man and wife, and in these days Mrs. Slump had vigorously denounced the arrangement as

“unnatural and hiniqtous.” The people had even arranged a Bazaar, the proceeds of which were to be handed over to the new minister for the purpose of giving a respectable matrimonial basis to his pastorate. The Bazaar was a triumphant success. Half-a-dozen ancient members, long since removed to more respectable localities, had been induced to attend, and had spent at least five shillings each. A County Councillor, whose father’s name was inscribed on the memorial tablet near the pulpit, had also been present, and had been munificent enough to contribute ten pounds. The sale by auction on the last day of the Bazaar had entirely hit the temper of a neighbourhood where everything was keenly bargained for, and had been a time of wild excitement to Jane Slump and Matilda Harris, each of whom had secured elaborate antimacassars at a purely nominal rate. But the professed purpose of the Bazaar was not attained. The proceeds were forty pounds; and the possession of so much money at once debased the rectitude of the ruling deacons. They resolved—with reluctance, so they said—that there were other things more urgent than the readjustment of Mr. Paterson’s matrimonial life. Paint was needed for the doors, glass in the windows, a stove against the cold of the winter months. They argued that these improvements would attract large crowds to the ministry of the Word,

and as crowds meant money, all would come right in the end for the minister. John Paterson said nothing whatever about this breach of trust. He showed no anger, no disappointment. He never by word or manner reminded his deacons of their broken promise. The stove and the paint did not bring the anticipated crowd. The congregation settled down to its normal forty or fifty. If by any chance a stranger appeared among them, he came but once, and was never seen again. Perhaps he found the paint inartistic, the stove insufficient. In course of time the existence of Mrs. Paterson was forgotten, ignored, put out of mind, and it was generally assumed that John Paterson preferred matters to remain as they were.

Perhaps he did ; and those who had seen Mrs. Paterson on the one occasion when she visited the chapel—viz., the opening day of the Bazaar—might have been excused for such an inhumane conclusion. She was a tall woman, with a low, broad brow, dark eyes and hair, a scornful mouth, a haughty carriage. She looked round the dingy room, with its damp-stained walls only partially disguised under draperies of red twill and paper rosettes, with bold, resentful eyes. Her scorn included the poverty of the people too ; to the County Councillor only did she deign to speak. Her attitude to her husband was curious. Of obvious intention she avoided him, standing near

the door, aside from the stream of people, her dark eyes very bright, her face pallid. When her eyes met her husband's they shrank, and her pallor deepened. When he spoke to her one could see a shudder run through her, and could mark her emotion in the quickened heave of her bosom, the trembling of her lips. There was supplication, too, in her manner, a sudden collapse of hauteur into humility at the sound of his voice, a flash of anger in the eyes as the lids dropped over them, resentment and appeal mingled like fire and tears—something at once confusing, pathetic, inexplicable.

The moment he left her her figure regained all its pride of pose, its rigidity, its combative energy of aspect; as he reapproached her the proud shoulders sunk, the proud face softened. All that day, across the babel of the room, the eyes of this separated man and wife challenged each other, and the victory was always with the man. When, at last, the day was over, she departed, with a certain brokenness of aspect, as of one who had undergone a bitter penance and survived it. She went one way, he another. It was the first and only time that she was ever seen in Dagnall Chapel.

There it might have ended, and the existence of a Mrs. Paterson have dropped wholly out of mind, and the clue to John Paterson's life have remained undiscovered, but for the circumstance

which occasions the writing of this record. It was in this tenth year of his residence in Dagnall Road that all at once the clasped book of John Paterson's life fell open, and I came to know his secret.

For in this tenth year certain changes occurred which greatly altered the prospects of the decayed chapel. Leases fell in, by which the endowment was trebled in amount; the genius of street improvement invaded Dagnall Road, and houses were pulled down, which gave the long obscure chapel a frontage to the main thoroughfare. There was no longer a grease-polished passage as the one means of approach; the sea had come back to the stranded hulk, and the tide of men poured along a broad pavement close to the doors. John Paterson could safely count upon a modest two hundred pounds a year, and had no further need to live solitary and desolate in his two narrow rooms. Those who remembered the one appearance of Mrs. Paterson began to speculate eagerly upon the hour of her new emergence from that mysterious solitude, known by the generic term of "the country." Jane Slump and Matilda Harris eyed the minister curiously, watching for signs of elation in his manner. Rumours began to spread that Mrs. Paterson would arrive in October, that the first Sunday of November was fixed for her advent, that at latest she would appear at Christ-

mas. There was a peculiar appropriateness in the selection of Christmas. This was, in fact, a suggestion which could be traced to the sense of poetic fitness which existed in the soul of Matilda Harris, who meditated the subject with tears in her eyes as she cleaned steps, and found it as fascinating as the last story in the *Family Herald*. But Christmas came, and the mysterious wife did not appear. John Paterson went in and out among his people and said nothing. Years had graven stern lines about his mouth, and had increased that subtle dignity which clothed him like an armour—turning the edge of all impertinent curiosity—and no one dared to question him. Then, early in January, when the raw east wind swept like a troop of swords across the desolate land, he was absent from his work for a fortnight. When he re-appeared, the lines around his mouth were graven a shade deeper, and he wore a wide band of black upon his hat. And then the news spread that the strange woman, with the proud, dark eyes and low brows, who had only once in those ten years visited the scene of her husband's work, was dead.

The news spread, as news does; but it was not helped by any single word from John Paterson. All that his congregation knew of the matter was derived from inference. They observed the black band upon the hat, the worn face, the sombre

glance ; the silent tragedy was as clear to them as though the coffin and the face of the dead woman were actually painted on the retina of his eyes. Perhaps the eye is not wholly an organ of vision. Who shall say that it is not also a mirror, in which the great terrors and tragedies of life hang reflected, until the hour when the wound in the heart heals and the memory forgets them ?

They knew also in another way. On that Sunday after his return there was a new note in John Paterson's voice, a throb of feeling which communicated itself to his audience. He spoke of kindness to the dead, and the lifelong sorrow of him who knows that he has been less than kind while time for love was his ; of the duty of forgiving even to seventy times seven, since there is none of us who does not need an infinite forgiveness from God ; of life itself as too sad a thing to be made sadder by the foolish bitterness of narrow jealousies and irrational animosities. His voice trembled, and that curious dignity of his seemed transmuted into something higher still and rarer—the awfulness of the prophet. His pale face and deep blue eyes seemed to glow ; for the first time it struck us that his grey hair was a contradiction, and that he was a young man as years go—a young man, who had been aged by sorrow ; a man who in his prime had been thrust by a violent fate into the shadows of age. As he ceased speaking the

shadows of age came back again. The glow faded from the tired face, his height seemed to contract, his shoulders to bend forward ; he was once more shrunk and grey, an unnoticeable man, cast by Nature for an obscure part, and content with it.

The lights were out in the chapel, the people had gone, when an afterthought took me to the dingy room which was called the minister's vestry. I knocked lightly at the door, and receiving no reply opened it, and went in. The room was in darkness, save for one small jet of gas, and there at the table sat John Paterson, with his head bowed upon his arms. His attitude was one of entire prostration, and the shudder of the shoulders told me that he was weeping.

As I was about to go, ashamed of having intruded on his sorrow, he motioned me to sit, and then he told me his story.

Yes, she was dead ; and he wept not so much for her death as for the shame and remorse of that inevitable thought which possessed him, that for him her death was release from an intolerable destiny. Let the truth be told at last ; she was a drunkard. Twice, in that earlier period of his life which was unknown to us, he had left a position of high responsibility and success because the shame of her weakness had overwhelmed him. As long as she loved him he could bear it, he could hope to save her ; but when at last her love died

his hope died too. Once more he had resigned his charge, and this time had buried himself in the obscurity of Dagnall Road. His plans, his studies, his ambitions, had all perished in that hour. He was glad to be poor, for that removed from him the temptation to summon back his wife to him, and once more renew the struggle and defeat which he had known before. He was glad also to be among the poor; for with them the demand for kindness was incessant, and in such compassionate activities he could forget his own smart. He had brought her up to the Bazaar in the hope that they might once more come together. She absolutely refused to share so mean a life. Proud and bitter of spirit, she had wholly despised him for reconciling himself to such a lot. Yet there were hours when all her past came back upon her, and then she was softened, and wrote piteous letters to him. Again and again after such a letter he had gone to see her, hoping that at last the crisis had come; but she who could pour out her best self on paper no sooner saw him than the old unconquerable obduracy of heart came back. He thanked God that before she died the heart of the child, of the lover, had been given her again. For a week he held her hand in his, and she had died with her mouth against his lips. He had been to blame. Had he known better the secrets of her nature he might perhaps have saved her.

Yes, he saw things now—saw them as they were. In those other years, when ambition burned hot within him, he had been a student intent on brilliant fame. He had passed his days, and had worked far into the night, in scholarly pursuits. He had not thought of her loneliness—the loneliness of a woman in a house where her husband sits behind a locked door, a woman who has no child, no intellectual pursuits. What had he shared with her? A mere fraction of his life. The things on which his heart was set were hidden from her. She felt the deprivation, was jealous of the purposes which usurped her place in his heart. Yes, he could dimly guess now how she felt, how the loneliness deepened, until unnoticed the vice sprang up which slew her. Was it her weakness? It was also his fault. Ah, if he could but have seen it so from the first! Sins—all sins—need two hearts for their growth; it needs the conspiracy of two follies to make a sin. An intolerable destiny! So he had told himself, not having sense to see that he had helped to shape it; and even with it all before him, with all the memorable outpourings of that last fortnight, still the shameful thought throbbed in his heart that her death had removed an incubus from his life, and that it was best as it was.

As he spoke, he still sat at the table, with his hands covering his face. The words came slowly,

as though wrung out of him. For some ten minutes after he had spoken he sat silent, the tears oozing between the locked fingers. Then he rose quietly, and went out without a word. He seemed altogether unconscious of my presence.

The next Sunday came, and with it all trace of emotional crisis in John Paterson had disappeared. His sermon was exactly the sort of sermon which he had preached at any time during the last ten years—simple, plain, practical. That new note in his voice—the mellow *vox-humana* of the heart—was never heard again. That flame of intense feeling, which had made his face glow, burned no more.

He took up his life again with stubborn resolution, stolid courage ; went in and out among the byeways of Hoxton working good with automatic diligence ; gave much, did much, saw strange tragedies, helped sordid miseries, and became better known than ever as a wise man in the hour of difficulty, a kind man in the hour of sorrow. His books stood dusty and unopened as before ; his aversion from study was complete, though no man was more deeply learned in the book of human life. Perhaps it was because he knew so much of life that he cared so little for books. What had Goethe to tell him? Dante? Plato? He moved amid the play of forces of which they wrote, touched the living essences which they described. His *Inferno* was in

Dagnall Road, his *Faust* was acted out in barbarous grossness round about him—sometimes, too, in subtler fashion in his own soul. He had hopes that of his life, as of Faust's, the final angelic verdict might be *saved*, but he was not sure. He sometimes had visions of a better Republic than Plato's, which was being slowly built up out of the chaos of things; but of this also he was not sure. He toiled amid the roar of muddy tides at the foundations, and often had no faith to see the finished pinnacles. Such thoughts as he had on such subjects he kept to himself; he knew them to be beyond the scope of the depressed and draggled remnant who heard him preach. Now and again they flashed like a throb of flame through the monotony of his words, and his poverty-stricken flock had the sense that there was a man behind the mask of that grey, shrunk figure in the pulpit, whom they did not know, and who could not be known by them. What they needed most was the applied compassion of practical help; and such help John Paterson gave them lavishly.

When the burden became too heavy, he fell back upon his former remedy; he took refuge in the elemental vastness of London. He walked eastward, westward; watched the unlading of ocean steamers in the Docks, went up the river on a penny boat, with eyes fixed upon the vast

curves of the shores ; imagined the hum of men in those long lines of warehouses and factories to the south, the throb of organs in St. Paul's and Westminster on the other bank. He fancied himself with Wren upon the great dome, when the last touch of gold was laid upon the cross, with Burke when he came out of Westminster Hall, after the triumph of his great speech for the indictment of Warren Hastings. He said to himself, as the boat hovered under St. Stephen's, "Perhaps Gladstone is speaking now" ; as it beat its way against the brown tide at Chelsea, "Ah, there, somewhere, Carlyle's pen is creating something as enduring as the stones of Wren." In the grey afternoon he saw the dingy wharves and warehouses dissolve in purple haze, becoming dignified and lovely for a little space, like a vaster Venice sprung suddenly from the churning waters, and hanging unsubstantial as a dream upon the formless skies. Through the opaque evening he saw the bridges stretched like ropes of fire above the water, and passing over them spectral forms, hurrying illuminations, and the sinuous blaze of lighted trains. Like an enormous instrument of music London lay, with its streets stretched from north to south, from east to west, as vibrant wires, touched and swept by the hands of giant destinies. That large music entered into his soul, as it had always done, and composed its

discords. The very contact with such multitudinous and various life infected him with vitality, and instructed him in a certain spacious charity.

He learned at last the rare and difficult art of being charitable to himself; of hoping that in some way his own poor life fitted in with some general and gracious purpose; and that, therefore, his own hopes and sorrows were of small account, and not to be considered, in the evolution of society. It was something, in so vast a scheme of things, to have the smallest place, and Dagnall Road grew tolerable, hospitable. It was something to take the humblest part in such a battle, and he fought as one for whom the day is short, the night imminent. Of that night he had many thoughts, mostly hopeful, none fearful; but the dominant one was that when it came he would be glad to rest.

Of that great sorrow of John Paterson's life there was, however, one open record. Close to the pulpit, and almost hidden from general sight, he had a small white marble slab placed, which bore two words only—*Peccavi! Miserere!*

He and I knew what they meant—no one else. He did not intend that any others should, and therefore he concealed his confession in the hospitable obscurity of what is, and is likely to remain, in the plainest sense, a language both dead and meaningless to the minds of Dagnall Road.

THE MUSIC OF THE GODS

*Who, of knowledge, by hearsay,
Reports a man upstarted
Somewhere as a god,
Hordes grown European-hearted,
Millions of the wild made tame
On a sudden at his fame?
In Vishnu-land what Avatar?*

THE MUSIC OF THE GODS

I HAD picked him up the night before in the neighbourhood of Leicester Square, and the instinct of old friendship had asserted itself. For I had known Jack Boynton in the old Balliol days, when great things had been expected of him, and, as 'Varsity estimates go, great things had really been done by him. He had always exercised over me a curious fascination. No finer picture of youth could be conceived than Boynton as he then was, for he had the head of a Greek god, compact and yet massive, with close rings of bright-coloured hair, a low, broad brow, eyes blue and deep, and of singular brilliancy, and a frame which, in its close-knit grace and virility, answered to the dignity and charm of the face. How it was that he had fallen out of the race no one knew. He was not very careful about the moralities, it is true, but he had never been involved in any sort of scandal. He had even at one time seemed to have religious tendencies, for he had ostentatiously mounted a large ivory crucifix upon his mantel-shelf, which, however, appeared ironically out of place between

two small bronzes of the Dancing Faun and a naked Apollo. All at once he had disappeared from the university, and left no trace. There were rumours of foreign travel, and there was a general belief among us that our "Waring" would turn up some day in some new effluence of genius and glory.

"O, never star
Was lost here but it rose afar,"

we said to one another when we named him. But years had passed, no word had come, and he had slowly slipped out of memory. Judge, then, the thrill that shot through me when, on rounding the east-most corner of Leicester Square on a hazy October evening, I found myself face to face again with Jack Boynton.

But it must be confessed that the thrill had more of surprise in it than pleasure, for the merest glance revealed strange changes in him. He wore a rough blue cloth jacket, such as sailors wear, a woollen collar, and a silk handkerchief loosely knotted at his throat. His clothes were worn and stained, and his hat was a rusty billycock. The intense youthfulness of his face and the close rings of bright hair remained, however, and his eyes had all the old quick light, and were as bright as ever. At first he seemed pleased to see me, then suddenly he became apathetic. I could not do less than

ask him to dine with me the next night, and he assented with some show of cordiality, which, however, struck me as slightly overacted. He insisted also on naming the place and hour. The place was a little Italian restaurant of which I had never heard, and the time was to be two hours before midnight. It seemed a curious whim, but Boynton had never done anything after an orthodox fashion, and my desire to know more about him made me jump to his humour without a second thought. So here we found ourselves, face to face at a little table in a long narrow room, eating an excellent dinner at the unusual hour of ten P.M.

The first part of the meal passed in unnoticeable dulness, with few words, and those of the most commonplace description. I had ample time to observe the dingy room with its foreign aspect and swart waiters, one of whom especially attracted me by his Ligurian grace and suppleness. Now and then among modern Italians one meets a man of the pure antique mould, who bears upon him the stamp of a vanished stateliness, and whom one could easily conceive as having led a legion and marched with Cæsar. This man—Antonio they called him—had such an air, and in the swift grace and dignity of his movements resembled Boynton, though he was of heavier build, and dark as Boynton was fair. It was to Antonio that Boynton gave all his

orders, and they were received with a curious excess of deference, which amounted almost to reverence. Toward the close of the meal Antonio appeared with a small ill-shaped bottle of wine, unlike anything which I had ever seen before. The bottle was deeply crusted with a reddish substance, so that it appeared to be fashioned of earthenware rather than glass, and bulged at the base into a form resembling a globe. The neck was long and thick, and had scored upon it certain curved lines, which had the appearance of a snake. As soon as Antonio noticed my eyes upon the bottle he hastily knotted a napkin round it, in so dexterous a fashion that it was completely concealed. He seemed agitated, and his hand shook as he poured the wine, and in Boynton's eyes there was some trace of the same agitation.

The wine itself was of the purest golden hue I ever saw. It held the light in an extraordinary fashion ; every drop, as it fell, was a topaz, and from the glass, when it was filled, there seemed to be emitted an actual radiance, a sunny effluence, which appeared to cast shadows on the white napery of the table. Boynton raised the precious liquor to his lips slowly, and with a certain awe as it seemed to me. What my own feelings were I can hardly determine, but certainly no such divine flavour had I ever felt upon the palate. It had the essence of all the flowers of the world in it, and the warmth

of a thousand suns. Its subtle glow, passing along nerve and vein, seemed to liberate every power of thought and fancy, and to produce a delicious sense of youth. On Boynton the effect was instantaneous. His face, with its pure Greek outlines, which hitherto had been impassive and almost sullen, began to glow as though it were illumined, and each ring of his yellow hair seemed a curved flame, soft and delicate, like the lambency of an aureole. I am aware, even as I write the words, how incredible and absurd they will appear; but I can only set down my impressions as they actually occurred to me at the time, and I can find no better phrase in which to record them. I do not know now, and I shall never know, how these things happened, or what miraculous liquor this was of which I drank; but I cannot be deceived as to its effects.

With the glow of the wine came the full tide of speech, and in a few moments we were each pouring out eager talk. Our thoughts ranged hither and thither in fanciful inconsequence, glancing upon a score of subjects, with a sort of fugitive brilliancy. Presently I found myself repeating the lines of Browning which I had so often applied to Boynton—

"O, never star
Was lost here but it rose afar!"

"Truer than you think," said Boynton gravely.
"The impermanence which poets attribute to man

is a pious fiction. We are the only permanent and immutable creatures on the earth. We sink here—we rise afar ; just so. That was no doubt what Browning meant, though he did not express it very clearly.”

“Metempsychosis, I suppose you mean,” said I. “We have all been other people, and have lots of new incarnations before us.”

“No, not that,” he replied. “That’s a barren notion. Who wants to be anybody else? I mean that you and I have really existed for thousands of years. I know I have, anyway.

“‘I have been many, yet inexorably
In each myself alone ; in ages gone
I marched with Xerxes, fell at Marathon,
Saw Carthage burn, and Alexander die,’”

he recited gravely.

We were silent for a moment ; then he said with a sudden change of manner, “Now I know very well what you are thinking about. You naturally want to know what I have been doing with myself since the old Balliol days. Oh, don’t deprecate your curiosity ; it’s a natural and wholesome sort of inquisitiveness. Well, if you don’t mind listening, I’ll take up the wondrous tale. It’s not likely we shall meet again for some years, and you were always a good listener.”

Then he began.

* * * * *

"There are few persons who have not had on rare occasions the curious sense of having been in a place, or looked upon a scene before. It is quite a common experience, though the impression is usually so fugitive that it passes almost before we are aware of it. In the case of a locality or of scenery there is nothing astonishing in such an impression. After all, places and scenes have little to differentiate them : all towns are strongly reminiscent of one another, and so is scenery. A Scotch sea-loch and a Norwegian fiord are so much alike that the dullest mind needs no jogging to perceive the resemblance ; and so there are groups of buildings in a town, or combinations of scenery in a country, which so far follow a pattern that one may readily fancy that he has actually been in these places before. These things are arranged in an endless series of replicas. It is by no means wonderful that occasionally the replica suggests the original, and is confused with it.

"Now I only mention this because it is a convenient preface to my story, and, as you will see, an apposite one. Have you ever had this same curious sense of familiarity in reading a book? I don't mean that you think you have read it before, but that something in it sets a fibre throbbing in the imagination, and for a moment or two you live in the scene it pictures.

"Well, this is what happened to me. It was a

dreary November afternoon, and I was sitting in my snug room at Balliol, reading in a desultory fashion. I forget now entirely what it was I was reading, but I have an impression it was Theocritus. All at once a passage in the old poet arrested me. The lines went ringing through my brain with an extraordinary insistence, and in a moment I was conscious of a change of atmosphere, as though I had passed swiftly through a strong draught of cold air, as a man might take a header into an icy stream. The next moment I emerged into another world. It was full of sunlight, and a sound of flutes, faint in the distance, breathed upon the warm air. There were hills of a soft bluish-grey, and a wine-coloured sea ; a green plain with oaks and laurels negligently grouped ; and close at hand a small pillared temple, in a grove of cypresses. In the dark heart of the cypresses human voices seemed to be sighing, and a profound sadness fell upon me. In the open air stood a low altar, and on it lay a wolf, his bristling jaws red with blood, and his gaunt flanks stiffened in death. Garlands of flowers hung upon the altar, and a wreath of laurel was fastened over the doorway of the temple. While I looked, the sound of the advancing flutes became clearer, and in an instant a procession of white-robed youths and maidens slowly defiled up the alley of the cypress-grove, and approached the temple. Until that moment

I had been conscious of no change in myself ; now I was suddenly aware of a rough cloak or toga of tawny skin which hung upon my shoulders, and also that I wore sandals, and had a curiously primitive stringed instrument in my hand. The moment the procession saw me it halted ; a look of awe and gladness was on each* face ; the sound of the soft fluting ceased, and all knelt.

"I began to touch the strings of my curious lyre, and to sing some soft Greek words, the mellow vowels of which alone made music, and a sort of ecstasy seized me. I shuddered with a strange joy, and the human voices in the cypresses ceased to sigh, and went like a wind of sound in and out among the strings of the lyre. Then suddenly the whole scene—grey hills, wine-coloured sea, procession, and temple—began to grow dim, as though one passed a wash of grey over a water-colour. I had again the sense of passing through a great draught of cold air—and there I sat in my room at Balliol. I had not been asleep ; I knew that because I still held the book in my hand, within a foot and a half of my face. Had I slept the relaxed muscles would have dropped it. So far as I could judge, I had been unconscious about a quarter of an hour. I was very cold, and it was some time before the circulation fully revived. Otherwise, I was none the worse ; indeed, upon the whole, I was conscious of a sort of spiritual

elation, a certain vital glow, and a sense of the delightfulness of being alive.

"Of course it goes without saying that I was a good deal impressed by this strange experience, though, after a week or two, the impression began to die away. I was inclined to think, upon reflection, that the whole thing might be accounted for as some subtle sort of epileptic seizure. I remembered how Coleridge dreamed the poem of *Kubla Khan*. I discerned the resemblance in my experience. I even tried to repeat it. Half-a-dozen times I sat in the dusk with one of the old Greek poets in my hand, expecting this blissful trance to overtake me, but nothing happened. I noticed, however, one curious difference in myself. I can describe it in no better way than to say that a sort of aloofness possessed me, a dislike of my fellows, a sense of something alien in my environment. You remember young Stockley, no doubt, and the particular primness of his clothes? Well, one day I met him coming out of Christ's, and a whole stream of ludicrous thoughts rushed through my mind. I found myself criticising his dress, as though I had never seen the masculine garments of the nineteenth century before. I wondered what sort of leg he had, and pictured what a sorry figure he would cut in sandals and a toga. I examined him carefully, with as disinterested a detachment of thought as a savage might have when he sees for

the first time the civilised man. The grey buildings, the hurrying 'grads, a passing drayman with his load of barrels, a young girl with slim shoulders, a country woman, with shapeless figure muffled in a coloured shawl—each stood outlined with intense distinctness before my mind, and the whole effect was of something foreign and ludicrous. I laughed uncontrollably, and it was the sound of my own laughter that brought me back to common sense. I found young Stockley looking at me with surprise and suspicion written visibly upon his stupid face.

“‘Oh, take it off, man, take it off, for God’s sake, I was saying. ‘These things, too: and these,’ I laughed, pointing to his trousers and his waistcoat. ‘My little man, you’re really too funny for anything. Where *have* you lived? What have you done to be dressed like this? What would Daphne, and Coronis, and Clymene say if they could see you!’

“Stockley turned very red, and said curtly, ‘I don’t in the least know what you’re talking about. It’s my conviction you’re drunk.’ And the little man looked up into my face with the nastiest scowl.

“At that moment I suppose I regained my modern self. I saw Stockley striding off in a rage, and the young girl looking at me with a blush upon her face. Of course, it was only Stockley

and this was Christ's, and what had I been saying or doing? I began to feel frightened about myself. Was I going to be ill? I consoled myself with a pull up to Iffley, and came back late in the afternoon with so vibrant a sense of glowing health, that I had no fear of illness, at any rate, and was ready to forget all the curious sensations of the morning.

"For the next four or five months I plunged into hard reading, and if I thought of these things at all it was only at long intervals, and with the sort of shame a young man feels when he suspects himself of some physical peculiarity or deficiency. Nevertheless the sense of aloofness did not leave me. I felt as though my whole nature were jarred in some way; I was not at ease in my environment, and I looked upon everything as from a distance, as one sees the faint outlines of a city and its moving crowds through a mist. However, there could have been nothing *outré* in my manner, for at that time, I may say without exaggeration, I was one of the most popular men in the 'Varsity. Men sought my society, and seemed to recognise me as a leader. Even the dear old Master had a special liking for me, and occasionally dropped his sententious irony, and talked Greek mysticism and philosophy delightfully to me. Of course the story about young Stockley had spread, but it was generally treated as the best of jokes.

Stockley was a dandified idiot, and every one was ready to laugh at him and applaud me.

“Well, as I have said, I read hard for four or five months, and over and above my regular reading I gave an hour or two a day to the Greek poets out of pure pleasure in them. It was now about April, and the first freshness of spring was in the air. Between the shelter of the high hedges there was a smell of violets; the bulbous candelabra of the chestnut-trees already had a shiny look; the clouds were white and high, and day followed day with sunshine and west wind. One day the charm of the weather overcame me, and I determined to take full advantage of it. I took train to Thame, and from there walked over the lovely range of hills that runs behind Brill. You know the country perhaps? Well, it is exquisite, and never more so than in early spring. The hills break at regular intervals into deep hollows, full of trees; you look down into them, as into vast rounded cups, overbrimming with green. Before you spreads the wide plain, grading through a hundred tints of sage-green and opal to the deep blue of the horizon. Along the hills the air blows fresh and pure, and on an April day there are a hundred changes in an afternoon—deep masses of moving shadow and shifting lights, that make the plain as elusive in its beauty as the sea, and to my mind much lovelier.

"I suppose I had walked as nearly on the top of the ridge as I could for about an hour, when I came to, one of these wooded fissures in the hills, and was tempted by its beauty to explore it. There was a steep path, which took me in a hundred paces into the wood, where fir and beech trees were mingled in about equal proportions. After entering the wood the path began to widen, until it was a broad turf road, soft and almost soundless to the foot. Suddenly, as I walked, my ear was arrested by the sound of flutes, a soft, clear music, rising and falling with the sighing of the wind in the trees. I held myself rigid at once, remembering my former trance, and determining to resist any recurrence of it with all my will-power. No doubt it was some country-boy tootling his tin-whistle on the way home from school, and the charm of distance did the rest. But I had no sooner suggested such an explanation to myself, than I repudiated it. For this music was of an altogether peculiar softness and rhythm, and was accompanied by a clear low chant—well, such as you might hear in a big scene at the Lyceum, a music behind the stage, you know. It hung in the air and seemed to pervade it, and there was something in it that overcame my rigidity. I became slowly conscious of a great elation, my feet moved as though they were winged; I felt a mingled buoyancy and stateliness in my

walk. Now you may call this epilepsy or what you will, but here is the plain truth. As I moved down this broad green alley under the beech-trees, this is what I saw. There was the little pillared temple I had seen six months before in my vision ; the low marble altar on which lay the dead wolf ; the white procession of youths and maidens defiling toward the temple, moving in smiling gladness to that rhythmic thrill of soft pipes, and chanting some rich deep-vowelled invocation as they moved. As before, they knelt when they saw me. Then I also began to sing, and they stood silent and ecstatic, grouped in exquisite attitudes under the broad-branched beeches. One fair girl, with straight brows and violet eyes, stepped forward and offered me flowers with timid hands. An old man, with long white beard, then poured some fragrant oil upon the altar, and a thin flame arose. Through the trees there came a rustling of leaves, and out of the shadows bright eyes gleamed, innocent and fearless. Then the pungent smoke from the altar began to draw a faint blue veil across the scene, and the fluting, which had commenced again, grew faint and fainter, and was lost in distance. The air grew cold, and I was alone.

“Now I warned you that what I had to tell you would probably be incredible. Well, let that be as it may, this is the sequel. It must have been

about four o'clock when I entered the wood ; it was seven when I left it. When I came to myself—to my modern self, let us say—this was what I saw. The moon was rising, and the sun had sunk in a clear sky, so that it was not dark. Close to me was a small stone building, with Greek pillars, and a rounded roof—probably a summer-house built years ago by the owner of the land, and apparently of very ancient date. A low marble seat exactly faced the door of the building, at about the distance of a dozen paces. There was no sign of man ; profound woods stretched on every side for not less than two miles. The path by which I entered the wood from the Brill hills I could not find, and it was with difficulty I discovered it a week later when I revisited the place. I followed a broad glade, and came out ultimately at a little village in the Aylesbury valley. I had no sense of illness, or of shaken nerves ; on the contrary, I felt full of the most joyous life. Whatever had happened to me, it was nothing in the nature of disease. My mind never felt so clear and strong, and my success a few weeks later in the exams. is the best evidence of my complete sanity."

Boynton stopped a moment in his narrative ; his silence was an interrogation.

"Well, if you ask me to speak quite candidly," I said, "I should say that there is nothing incredible

in your story, because it is capable of the most natural of explanations. You over-read and excite your brain. In such a state you take a walk too long for you, and fall asleep. All the old Greek pictures with which your imagination is saturated weave themselves into a dream of peculiar vividness. True, you have dreamed it before, but what of that? It is by no means uncommon for a man to dream the same dream over again at various periods of his life. Some people dream the same dream, or variations of it, whenever the brain is over-excited, as you very well know."

"Precisely. That was what I thought at first. But there are two curious facts which I have not yet named."

"Well, what are they?"

"One is that after this second vision the alteration in myself, which I had previously noticed, became more marked. The sense of aloofness grew upon me; there seemed to be an actual atmosphere between myself and my fellows, which I could not pierce. I felt an irritation of the bitterest kind in the very presence of modern life. All seemed inexcusably colourless, stupid, detestable. And this feeling took a new and strange form. You remember my room at Balliol? Well, if you do, you will recollect that on the mantelshelf I had a carved ivory crucifix, standing between two bronzes, one of the Dancing Faun

and the other of Apollo. Well, when I came back from that walk over the Chilterns, the first things that caught my eye were these three figures. I looked at them with an intensity of attention which was quite unaccountable, and it seemed to me that the uplifted arm of the Apollo was pointed scornfully at the Crucifix, and that in the attitude of the Dancing Faun there was a very abandonment of contempt for the still, sad Figure of sorrow, the mournful effigy, that stood between these incarnations of youth and joy. And I shared the contempt. A bitter, unaccountable resentment shook me, a sense of some intolerable indignity and wrong inflicted on me by this figure of the Crucified. I seized it with hasty hands, and broke it into fragments, and danced upon it. Something in that figure of the Faun seemed to breathe an incitement to motion, a compulsion to revolt. And suddenly, as I danced, I once more heard that soft low throb of flutes, distinct and clear. This was no dream, for I was wide awake, dancing on the fragments of my poor crucifix, and I heard that rhythmic flute-music as distinctly as I ever heard anything in my life."

"Nerves, my dear fellow, all nerves, I assure you."

"But unfortunately for your theory I was in glorious health. In fact, I had never felt such a sense of vitality. It was like a wine in

my veins. I slept well, ate well, worked hard, pulled a fine stroke oar—where does your theory of nerves come in? And besides, what should produce this hatred of the crucifix? For, I may as well say at once, that in that moment when I smashed the crucifix I finally gave up Christianity. I felt my whole mind revolt from it, once and for ever. It seemed in its very essence alien to me; in myself I was aware of something that could never be reconciled with it. Most men feel a poignant regret in such a decision. I felt none. I only felt that in some way I had followed the true bias of my nature, that I had found myself. I could trace at the time no sort of connection between these visions of mine and such a decision; yet I felt that something had happened, or was happening in me, which made such a renunciation inevitable. It had to be.

“Well, let me pass on, and you will see how one by one these events fell into place, and at last explained themselves.

“I told you that a week after that strange experience in the woods I went back to the place. I had some difficulty in finding the exact hollow, for along these hills the wooded basins are much alike, and I had taken no very careful notes of the topography. At last, however, I found the path, descended into the wood, and after half-an-hour’s walk came upon the spot.

"It was exactly as I had pictured it; so far it was no dream. At the end of a long glade, on either side of which rose tall beeches, branched into an arch like the groined roof of a cathedral, stood a curious stone building. It was round, like the pictures you see of the temple of the Vestals in the Forum at Rome; its roof rested on fluted pillars set at short intervals; its doorway was open to the winds. Outside, in the bright sunlight, was the low marble seat or altar, precisely as I have already described it, and I was certain, as I examined it, that the surface was slightly blackened as by fire.

"The place was absolutely solitary, and I had plenty of time to examine it. Part of the building seemed to be built of tolerably modern masonry, but about half of the pillars were of fine marble, and very old. A beautiful frieze ran under the cornice, much broken, it is true, but still distinctly beautiful in design and workmanship. Over the doorway was what seemed to be a motto in Greek characters, but it was sadly defaced, and quite illegible. I took a rough sketch of the building, and was coming away, when I heard a step in the underwood, and an elderly gamekeeper came into view. He told me, of course, that I was trespassing, which no doubt was true; but he was a very decent fellow, although taciturn, as men often are who spend their lives in the loneliness

of woods and moors. I gave him a cigar, and he began to talk slowly, and with long pauses.

"I learned from him that the ground we stood upon belonged to a certain Roger Cranbourne, and that it was his grandfather who had erected the temple. The Cranbournes had all been eccentric, and the present Roger Cranbourne was no exception to the rule. When I asked why they were considered eccentric the man pursed his lips, and for a time said nothing. Then he seemed to think better of his silence, and he told me bit by bit a very curious family history.

"From what I could make out the first Roger Cranbourne had flourished about the beginning of the century. He had been a friend of Byron, and was more or less identified with Byron's wild-thinking and hard-living set. He travelled a good deal, and was in Greece about 1815, not returning to this country until after Byron's death in 1824. When he came back to his estate, he was so altered that no one recognised him. He built this temple in the woods from fragments of the marbles which he had brought home with him from 'furren parts,' as my friend put it. He lived the life of a recluse, never went to church, had the very bells removed from the tower because they angered him, and during the summer months lived almost entirely in the woods. He died suddenly, leaving an only son, who bore the family

name of Roger. This son also went abroad as soon as he was of age, and died in Athens. He had married a Greek girl, who did not long survive him, and who had never visited England. Again there was one son, who bore the name of Roger, and who was supposed to be abroad. This son would now be about forty. The game-keeper had not seen him since he was a youth of twenty, when he spent a year on the estate. What was he like? Well, he couldn't rightly say. One thing he did know, that he was more 'mazed' than his father. He was always hanging about this old summer-house, just like his grandfather did. Yes; come to think of it, he did remember last time he saw 'un, and what he were like. He were very straight, but not over tall; he had a lot of bright-coloured hair, and dark eyes, and a straight nose. He used to walk about the woods mostly in a velvet jacket, and without any hat, with some old book or other in his hand. He once asked him if he'd ever seed anything out of ordinar' about this foolish old summer-house—any one coming out of it or going in, particular at nights? Of course he hadn't. If he had, should soon ha' let them know what for. 'Oh,' said he, kind o' solemn like, 'doan't ye disturb 'em; let 'em come if they likes.' S'pose he meant gipsies and suchlike, but there warn't likely to be any such folk in such a place, anyway. That was

about all he could remember. His memory was kind o' discollected about such things. However, he didn't suppose he'd ever see his master agin, now. Hadn't been there these twenty year, very nigh, and no doubt 'ud die furren like his father before 'im.

"That was the gist of the gamekeeper's story, and a very curious story I took it to be. One thing was clear: there was, at all events, a vital connection between this solitary woodland glade and Greece. The frieze of this lonely temple in the woods might have been designed by Phidias, the pillars might have seen the Greek armies march to meet Darius more than two thousand years ago. So far as one could judge, the Cranbournes had been mixed up with Greek life and politics for generations. The marbles—well, wasn't it somewhere between 1800 and 1815 that Lord Elgin robbed the Acropolis, and annexed the frieze of the Temple of Winged Victory, to the disgust of Byron and a good many other people? There was no difficulty in accounting for this temple; no doubt the first Roger Cranbourne got some of the spoil and put it to this use.

"I sat a long time thinking it over after the gamekeeper had left me. The place was very silent, an almost religious awe possessed the woods. A blackbird hopped silently, as with feet of velvet, across the glade; a squirrel ran along the cornice

of the deserted temple. What, after all, if there should be some occult secret about the place—some undying magic of a world long since passed away, which had found a final refuge in these immemorial woods? Why not the gods of Greece in Oxfordshire as well as Thessaly? Once I strained my ears eagerly at the sound of a movement in the grass, and a clear flute-note in the distance; but it was only a rabbit scurrying through the withered bracken, and a blackbird adjusting his mellow *vox humana* stop to the solemn hush of evening. It was twilight when I turned homeward. I had learned nothing, it is true, that could be said to have explained my own experiences and sensations; but I felt nevertheless that I was a step nearer the solution of the mystery.

“I left Oxford shortly afterwards. You will remember that I went away suddenly, and left no clue to my whereabouts. My reasons lay in the events I have already narrated. I felt a growing and unconquerable distaste to university life, a sense of the childishness of the whole business. It was a lovely summer, and I spent nearly the whole of it out of doors. I was at Pangbourne, at Goring; I explored the least known eyots of the Thames, I walked a great deal through the solitary beechwoods of Buckinghamshire, visited Horton, where Milton wrote his *Comus* in the freshness of his youth, and stayed in a little

cottage at Chalfont, near the still smaller cottage where he wrote the *Paradise Regained* in his austere old age. I read a great deal, but mostly in the classics—Ovid, Lucretius, Virgil. One book which made a deep impression on me that summer was old Apuleius—you remember all about the Golden Ass, and the air of marvel that clothes the story, everything full of charm and freshness, like a child's dream told to children in the dawn of the world. My mind was full of energy, but my thoughts were often of the strangest. I concerned myself a good deal with the old mythologies which lay behind the writings of all these old poets. People had believed them once; why were they incredible now? They had been the faith of a great people, perhaps the greatest. What had happened to the world that the modern English mind rejected as absurd what the Greek intellect believed as sacred? Besides, after all, they were rational as well as charming. The gods were delightful deifications of natural properties—the air, the sun, the woods, the waters. What better gods did you want? And how easy to imagine them! From the rounded hollows of the sea-wave, scooped out like a great purple shell silvered with foam—an Aphrodite—from the tangled light and shadow of the woods the dryades—in the still depths of unfrequented forests Pan and his joyous company! . . . I walked through these great beech-

woods of Bucks with the constant sense of such unseen comradeship as this. Often, also, my thoughts went back to the Cranbournes and what the old gamekeeper had told me of them. Were they, too, touched with this divine distraction which made modern life abhorrent to them? Had they, too, dreamed a dream which had opened to them torturing visions of some fairy unattainable world, a dream handed on from father to son, a quest taken up by each in turn, of which that haunted temple in the woods was the type and key? Sometimes it seemed to me that I was approximating to them. I, too, spent my days in wandering through the woods, or floating on the quiet waters of the upper Thames, hatless, and with 'some old book or other' in my hands, as the gamekeeper had put it. And yet, remember, I was not unhappy. It would be nearer the truth to say I was ecstatic, for my exuberant sense of youth was in itself a sort of ecstasy.

"And now for the sequel. Towards the end of the year I went to London and took a couple of rooms not far from Piccadilly. There was always something in the roar and tumult of the great city which fascinated me. Some day, you know, a great poet will take London for his theme, and he will make of it the grandest poem in the world. Just as I had spent whole days in listening to the wind-music in the woods, so now I drank in the

tumult of the highways, and rejoiced in it. I heard in the infinite reverberations of the streets the trampling of a great host, vaster far than was ever led by Xerxes or Alexander, marching to a grim battle that never had a truce. I watched the battle, alien from it, but not indifferent to it. This, at least, was life ; it was not playing at life, which is the chief occupation of universities. I was a mere spectator, but an eager one. I watched the storm of action ; that was enough for me.

“ One afternoon it happened that I was tempted by the extreme mildness of the air to spend an hour in St. James’s Park. Usually I never entered the parks ; they were too clumsy a plagiarism on nature. But there was on this afternoon an almost spring warmth in the air, and the grass had been freshened by heavy rain, and the water sparkled. I had been sitting some time, watching the nursemaids and the children, the hurrying clerks, and the heavy-eyed out-o’-works, when my attention was arrested by a man who was walking slowly toward me. He carried his hat in his hand, and wore a tarnished brown velvet jacket, out of the pockets of which some leather-bound books bulged. He had a quantity of fair hair, dark eyes, and a face that was singularly worn and yet eager. As he passed he looked at me with what seemed to be surprised scrutiny ; then he turned back, and took the unoccupied seat beside me. All at once

there flashed across my mind the old gamekeeper's description of Roger Cranbourne. The fair hair, the velvet jacket, the slim and ancient books protruding from the pocket—they entirely answered to Roger Cranbourne.

"Before I could take any note of what led up to it we were engaged in conversation. Somehow the man had a look of Shelley about him: just that delicacy and grace of complexion which you see in portraits of Shelley, and something too of Shelley's intensity of nature and boyish frankness visible in his eyes. I think our talk began by some mention of poetry, a line he quoted which was familiar to me, and wonderfully apposite to the scene before us. The moment I began to speak his manner changed. He embarrassed me with the closeness of his scrutiny. I fancied there was something of deference which approached to fear in his look. Then he suddenly laid his hand on my arm and said, 'Don't you hear it? Listen.'

"I heard the deep hum of London, the boom of the great bell at Westminster striking four, the shrill shouts of the children at play beside the water. And something else, too. Once more there fell upon my ear that soft throb of flutes which I had heard three times before. It was clear, distinct, unmistakable. The Park faded out like a stage scene over which the curtain falls, and for a moment the old spiritual elation thrilled through me, and

I saw distinctly a pillared temple rise in misty outline from the sward of the Park, and a long line of white-robed youths and maidens move towards it. The vision lasted but an instant. I turned slowly to him and said, 'You must be Roger Cranbourne, I think?' He smiled, and said, 'And you? Ah, well, I needn't ask. You probably don't know who you are.'

"This was sufficiently astonishing, but what he went on to say was much more so. He assumed that I knew his history; he never inquired by what means.

"'You have been to that summer-house of mine at Deepthorpe? I knew it. You need not tell me what you saw there; I know already.'

"And then he began to unfold a story which gave the clue to all that had happened to me. He, and his father and grandfather before him, had cherished a great secret, and had spent their lives in striving to unravel it. The first Roger Cranbourne had, as I supposed, obtained the marbles for his summer-house by robbing an obscure Greek temple, in the time when Lord Elgin had made such forms of theft fashionable. It was a temple small in size, but of exquisite design, which stood among the solitary hills a few miles from Athens. According to his own account, as he was removing part of the frieze, a terrible voice spoke out of the depth of the

temple, and thunder began to roll among the hills. In the same instant he saw a youth of majestic figure stand in the doorway of the temple, eyeing him with contemptuous anger.

“‘Poor fool, who thinkest Apollo and the gods dead,’ said the voice. ‘It shall be yours to seek the gods for ever, and not find them; yet at last they shall be found by your children’s children.’

“From that hour Roger Cranbourne was a changed man. If a vision changed Saul of Tarsus, why not Roger Cranbourne? He was convinced that the gods were not dead—that the deities of old Greece still lived in some seclusion of the world remote from the ways of men.

“He spent his life in exploring the interior of Greece, and searching for proofs of his theory. He quarrelled violently with Byron for coming to Missolonghi; he wanted Greece left alone, in possession of her ancient peace and deathless memories. He wrote and left behind him, as a heritage to his son, a detailed account of all that he had done and seen. The son shared his passion to the full. He lived in Athens, and died there, having given all his life to the pursuit of proof of his father’s theory. And his son, the man who sat beside me, had done the same. He was steeped in Greek poetry, and knew more of Greek mythology than any man alive. What had been denied to his father had been given to him. He

had heard more than once, in the solitary nills of Greece, during his explorations, this mystical music of pipe and flute, slowly floating among the ruins of marble temples, and lost in blue distances. He had learned also that he was not alone in his belief or in his quest. There were others who had heard the music of the gods; there was, in fact, a club in London composed of those who practised the old rites of Greek worship, and sought the favour of Apollo. And, the long and short of it was, that in me he had found the true Apollo, the child of Jupiter and Latona, the immortal patron of art, and music, and poetry, the inventor of the lyre, the slayer of the python, the glorious sun-child whose head was clothed with beams of light, the deity of the spoliated temple, long banished and ignoble, but still worshipped and waited for by the elect souls of the world!"

"All this in a London park, mind you, on a December afternoon, with 'Favorite' 'buses rumbling in the distance down to Victoria, and newsboys shouting a 'Spechul Hextra *Hecho*.'"

Boynton rose, and waved his hand with an angry gesture. He had read my incredulity on my face.

"Not a word!" he cried. "I no longer explain myself—I affirm myself."

"But," I began, "you surely cannot think——"

"I have ceased to think," he said gravely. "I

am the product of causes which defy thought. Yet consider what I have told you. Take the incidents one by one, and weigh their significance. First, this strange waking up in myself of sensations which unlock the past ; then, the visions, always the same, and explicable on no theory of disease ; the curious hatred of Christianity, as of something that excites in me fear and revulsion ; the basis of real fact in all that relates to the Cranbournes, and the temple in the woods. They all fit together, they cohere, they explain each other. Man, I say, they cohere !” he ended passionately.

He stood flushed and silent, and I am free to confess that a vague fear began to possess me. There was something in his aspect which was bright and terrible. The close rings of his hair seemed more and more like delicate curved flames, and his eyes were like wells of magnetic fire. Writing in cool blood, now that years have passed, it would be easy to say that he was insane ; but no such thought crossed my mind at the time. There was intellect stamped on every line of his face ; his aspect was radiant, but with no baleful fires of mental disorder—rather with youth, beauty, and truth.

The hour was late ; it was close on midnight.

“ I do not expect that we shall ever meet again,” he said. “ There can be no harm in letting you see that at least I have not altogether dreamed a

dream. You modern men"—I noticed the way in which he unconsciously detached himself from me and all my world—"have much to learn. And first of all you have to learn that there is nothing so false as the obvious, and nothing so likely to be true as the improbable."

He beckoned Antonio, and spoke a few words to him in a language which was strange to me. The man bowed very low, and in a moment or two returned wearing a long black cloak.

"Come," said Boynton.

I rose and followed without a word. It did not even occur to me to make the least resistance. Whatever was the species of power or influence which Boynton possessed, it controlled me like magic.

We passed out into the rainy streets, and were soon threading the tangled maze of Soho. I recognised Wardour Street for a moment, but that was all. We plunged into bye-paths and alleys, crossed one or two broader thoroughfares, and again were lost in the gloom of brick labyrinths, rubbed our shoulders against slimy, dripping walls at sharp corners, and stopped at last at a broad doorway, framed in ancient wooden pilasters. The door opened silently to the signal of Antonio, and I found myself in a wide oak-panelled hall. It was evidently one of those ancient houses still to be found in Soho, once the town-houses of the

great gentry, now hidden away and forgotten in the growth of modern London. A dim light burned, a broad oak staircase rose before me, losing itself in the upper darkness. Boynton and Antonio had disappeared.

I had waited for perhaps ten minutes, when I heard, far away in the upper stories, what seemed like choral singing. A moment later a bright light flooded the staircase, and Antonio came to me. He was no longer dressed as modern men are; he wore a species of white garment, girded at the waist, with open armholes, through which his swarthy arms appeared.

"The Signor is ready?" he said quietly.

I nodded assent. He began to ascend the broad staircase, and I followed him, not knowing what to expect. As we ascended higher the music became more defined. It was peculiarly soft, slow, and solemn, like nothing which I have heard before or since. I could discern something like the mellow note of the oboe, the thrill of a muted harp-string—that was all. Then, suddenly, broad folding-doors at the top of the staircase were flung open, and I saw the strangest scene.

The room was a large one, of noble proportions—probably the ancient ball-room or banqueting hall of the mansion. There was a lofty painted ceiling, half-a-dozen tall windows, and panelled walls. There was no furniture. At one end of the room

deep curtains of ivory-white hung from cornice to floor. A soft light fell apparently from the ceiling, but it lit the room imperfectly, leaving deep shadows. A peculiar pungency filled the air : something reminiscent of incense, but it was rather a pungency of flowers, a faint, intoxicating odour, that seemed to come in gusts or waves, making the air suave and languorous. There were about thirty men present, all dressed like Antonio in long, white garments ; they were all young, and their faces had a curious pallor as of ecstasy. So absorbed were they, so visibly caught in the strain of some powerful emotion, that my entrance did not excite the least attention. They were reciting what seemed to be a litany, but in tones so low that the words were indistinguishable. All the time the music went on, subtly weaving itself into the cadences of their voices, with now a low vibrating note from some mellow wood-instrument, and now the keen thrill of a harp-string.

All at once the light grew less, and finally went out. We were left in total darkness. Still the chant went on, growing louder and more impassioned ; and now faint flute-notes began to dominate the music. They grew clearer, louder ; and the men's voices rose into splendid fulness of tone. Then, all at once, the curtains at the end of the room were drawn back, a soft light spread through the room, and all the men fell upon their knees.

Two men advanced through the folded curtains, dressed as the others were in white, and in one of them I thought I recognised Roger Cranbourne. There was that unmistakable look of Shelley of which Boynton had spoken, the eager, hectic face, the intense purity and youthfulness of aspect, the ecstatic eye. The two men advanced slowly, reciting in full, resonant voices the following lines in Greek, which I afterwards discovered to be sentences from Pindar, Sophocles, and Aristophanes:—

Blessed is he who has seen the gods before he goes below ground.

Thrice happy they who have been initiated before they die, for theirs is the lot of life, and evil is it with the others.

We alone enjoy the holy light, we, who were initiated, and led a life of godliness toward both kin and stranger.

“*Io Apollo!*” cried the men in chorus, “*Io Apollo!*”

And then came the climax. The music sank to a breath, the chorus of the prostrate men to a whisper. A strange reverence seized me, and, without any sense of volition, I found myself also kneeling. “*Io Apollo!*” went on the awful whisper. “*Io Apollo!*” cried the two men in a voice of triumph; and each knelt. And then, from between the folded curtains, the soft light seeming to clothe

him, advanced a bright, majestic figure. He was naked, save for the yellow skin of some animal, which covered one shoulder, and fell to his knees. His face was young and extremely beautiful, and shone like a mask of alabaster behind which a light burned; the close rings of his hair were so many curved flames. Nothing more godlike could be imagined; and yet I knew at a glance that it was Boynton. He passed slowly down the room, and the chant of "*Io Apollo!*" rose to ecstasy as he came nearer. The room seemed full of the very essence of youth. I felt an indescribable elation, as though I had been bathed in some healing magnetic stream. Boynton stopped a moment before me and held out his hand. I did not respond. I could only stare blindly, conscious of an awful presence, of a magic that thrilled, and awed, and exhilarated me.

"Be not faithless, but believing," he said quietly, "*Io Apollo!*" broke out the chorus once more, and the music seemed melting into infinite harmonies. "*Thrice happy they who have been initiated before they die, for theirs is the lot of life, and evil is it with the others,*" they all chanted in unison.

Suddenly all became dark. A few moments later I stood once more in the broad hall, and Antonio was with me. We passed out without a word into the rainy streets. It was near two o'clock, and London lay like a tired giant, dreaming

the dreams of Mammon. We parted in Leicester Square, and I found courage to say, "Where's Boynton?" But Antonio only frowned, and said, "Ah, Signor, quietness is best." And with that enigmatical sentence he disappeared, nor have I seen him since.

Years have passed since these occurrences, but the memory of them is as fresh and vivid with me as though they had happened yesterday. Boynton I have never seen again. But I never read Browning's poem without thinking of him, and often on a sunny afternoon in Regent Street I have found myself eagerly scanning the stream of faces, in the vague hope of seeing his emerge, fresh and young, from the confusion of tired and anxious faces which compose a London crowd.

The other day, in turning over an old volume at a bookstall, I came upon a passage which arrested my interest, because it brought the problem of Boynton back to me in a peculiarly distinct and urgent fashion. The book was one of those desultory and delightful volumes of essays, full of fanciful conceits, which were common in the seventeenth century, and the writer asks:—

"Why should it not happen that beside immortal waters the eyes of men should still behold the forms of deities more immortal than the waters; that, where so many immemorial things exist, the immutable gods of woods and pastures should not still be

found unchanged : so that purged ears might still hear, perchance, the pipes of Pan upon the air, and purged eyes behold Apollo and his lyre ? ”

I leave others, either more or less sceptical than myself, to answer that question.

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